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STRIPLV custom tri-blend ultra-soft t-shirts with photography of your favorite *STRIPLV* models shot by photographer Santodonato produced to order. The first four designs feature Maddy O'Reilly, Noelle Rose, Alex Grey and Danielle Trixie.

14 - STRIPLVHEALTH
According to the Hazelden-Betty Ford clinic, there has been a steady rise in drug overdoses since the pandemic began in early March. "We saw an 18 percent increase nationwide in overdoses in March, a 29 percent increase in April and a 42 percent increase in May," said John Engebret, who runs Minnesota Out-patient Services at Hazelden-Betty Ford.



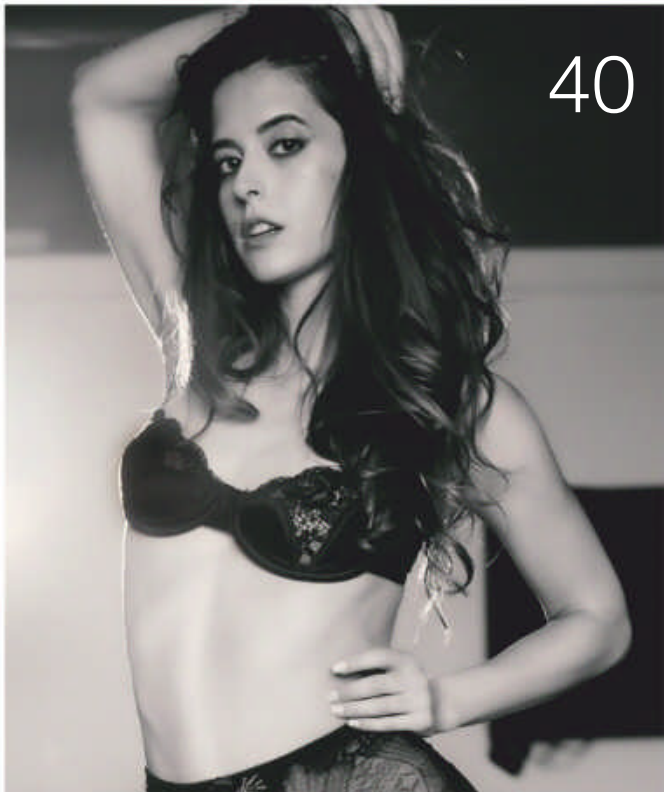
16 - STRIPLVDINING - VFN's TREK ACROSS AMERICA II
Traveling across the country is what this nerd got to do recently. A good friend from the music business decided to buy a recording console from a member of The Foo Fighters in Los Angeles and hired my husband and me to drive it from L.A. to commission the desk in its new home in Royal Oak, Michigan. In the last issue, I chronicled our first two stops. From Omaha, we decided to power through and get to Michigan the next day.

18 - EUFRAT - PERFECTION
Czech Republic beauty Euftrat is perfection in the water in this natural light pictorial, which showcases this goddesses natural assets and gives us an eyeful of her eastern-european charm.

30 - SUPPORTING AMERICAN ENTREPRENEURS' RESILIENCY
One thing entrepreneurs know how to do is solve problems; they are resilient. COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge, impacting every main street in America. More than ever, there is widespread consumer awareness of how small businesses are the heartbeat of local economies.

32 - ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER - HALF-FULL
Arnold Schwarzenegger has always been larger than life. First, he was the Austrian stud who intimidated and muscled his way into winning seven Mr. Olympia bodybuilding championships. Then he used his good looks and natural guile to make his mark in Hollywood and ultimately become one of the biggest box-office stars in the film business.

38 - INSTAGRAM CRUSH - NOVEMBER 2020
This month's Instagram Crush features influencers



Daniela Baptista, Sydney Sweeney, Alix Lynx, Miss Bo and four more knockouts that will get your blood boiling.

40 - ABBIE MALEY - WANT

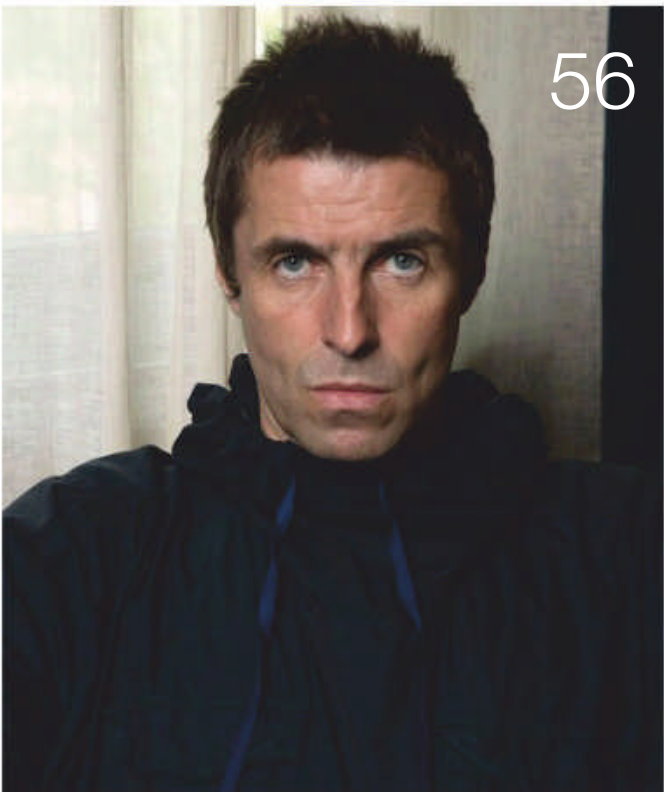
Los Angeles actress and model Abbie Maley shot in black and white in classic black lingerie exhibiting her petite well-defined physique in the smoldering photo pictorial shot by Santodonato.

54 - STRIPLV TRENDING

This month's trending section features singer-songwriter King Elle Noir - Shut the fuck up! In her own words, we take a look at what makes this songstress tick.

56 - LIAM GALLAGHER - CHAMPAGNE SUPERNOVA

Gallagher discusses rock 'n' roll excesses, growing



older, and how the industry has evolved almost to a point where it is unrecognizable from the mid-nineties.

62 -MELISSA KIMBRO - MANNEQUIN

Melissa plays Twiggy meets mannequin with her strikingly classic beauty and artsy makeup and hair in this studio shot pictorial by resident photographer-Santodonato.

72 - WHAT HAPPENED IN VEGAS: THE NIGHT WE BECAME A GHOST TOWN

In this issue, we reach back only a handful of months to an event that has impacted our city profoundly and, for better or worse, might be shaping and designing our future. At 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, the process of shutting down the world-famous Las Vegas Strip began.



74 - TOPSY TURVEY - PART 2

Part 2 of a new feature short-story by the Sandoval Brothers. A midwinter's biting chill has brought four abandoned souls of the streets huddled around the fledgling warmth of their makeshift trash barrel fire. Inspired by the shimmering stars flung across the dark and unveiled heavens, one of the congregants reveals to his chance audience that he is no mere street vagrant as he may appear.

80 - #TBT

Slaine photo shoot on September 2, 2014, by Santodonato.

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

These are historic times. This a year that will stand out in our memories for decades to come. It's hard to predict our world's state when this magazine lands in your hands. Whatever the outcome of our impending election, it's important to remember what this month should remind you about. November isn't just about politics. Each year when the calendar falls on this time of year, we are generally focused on where the family will celebrate Thanksgiving. This year more than any other in recent memory, is when we all should embrace what the holiday should be about. It's about bringing people together and showing gratitude for what we do have. It's about making time for the people that we love. Celebrating those we have and understanding the impact they have on shaping who we are. This issue will be distributed to the widest audience the magazine has ever seen since our launch in January of 2006. We are hitting the newsstands in record numbers at major chains throughout the country. While other adult titles have stopped printing, we at STRIPLV have carved out our niche with an incredibly loyal subscriber base that longs for our print edition each month. This hard copy distribution, along with our digital distribution to over 100 countries through Zinio.com, is making the future look very bright for STRIPLV. I am very excited about our increased distribution and look forward to introducing more readers to our publication. I hope when new eyes check out our title, they will be encouraged to bring more gratitude into their lives, and visually I hope I can promote a nationwide peak of sexual satisfaction.

Enjoy the issue,

S

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AMERICA IS IN THE MIDST OF AN EPIDEMIC OF OVERDOSES

NATIONWIDE OVERDOSE NUMBERS ARE UP STARTLINGLY; POINTING TO A REAL EPIDEMIC WITHIN THE PANDEMIC

By Dave Marlon

According to the Hazelden-Betty Ford clinic, there has been a steady rise in drug overdoses since the pandemic began in early March. “We saw an 18 percent increase nationwide in overdoses in March, a 29 percent increase in April and a 42 percent increase in May,” said John Engebret, who runs Minnesota Outpatient Services at Hazelden-Betty Ford.

In Utah, recent data has suggested that overdoses are on the rise, likely fueled by the increase in the availability of the powerful drug Fentanyl. This is something that is being attributed to the disruption of the traditional opiate drug supply lines during the pandemic and the fact that 90% of Fentanyl is made right here in America.

Data from Utah Naloxone has documented a rising number of overdoses. In August, they saw 175 overdose reversals, an increase from 125 they saw in July and 99 in June.

Even more alarming, US News & World Report recently reported that nearly 41% of adults surveyed this past summer “reported an adverse mental or behavioral health condition,” as a result of the stress from the pandemic and economic fallout.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

It’s the well-known secret that America has been suffering through an opioid epidemic for decades, since the late ‘90s. Still, it’s the fact that the pandemic has supercharged stress and anxiety in American society that is making these overdose numbers rise so drastically. Sadly, it’s not surprising. Whether it’s COVID or financial woes or just the yearn for normal human contact, which COVID has made incredibly complicated – there are many stressors on people right now.

Relapsing or turning to drugs in a time of great stress – looking for that escape essentially- is relatable and very human.

The other component to the rise in overdoses is the increase of the availability of Fentanyl nationwide, and the fact that many police departments are reporting finding that Fentanyl has been laced into non-opioid drugs, such as Xanax or even marijuana, MOLLY, ecstasy, and more. Usually, you only find Fentanyl on its own or mixed with heroin or other opioids such as Percocet or Vicodin, an often-deadly cocktail.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP? TREATMENT AND EDUCATION

Detoxing from drugs is just the first step. Typically to treat addiction, you have to treat the underlying mental illness that is driving the habit. That means a comprehensive program that lasts much longer than 30 days.

Throughout my career in addiction services, I’ve seen time and time again that the real hope, the real healing, is done through proper treatment of patients, including the correct mix of medication and counseling, lifestyle services, including diet, exercise, job, and this extends for months and months after detox.

At the moment, the government is doing nearly nothing to help with the treatment of patients. One of the biggest obstacles to treatment is often that an addict can’t afford it, or it’s not covered by insurance. In this instance, a government program similar to Medicaid, or a state-financed program, would be most helpful in terms of actually getting patients into rehab and into a bed. I can’t tell you the number of times we’ve had a willing patient, who desperately was seeking treatment, but by the time they managed to get the funds together, or got approved for Medicaid, they had relapsed, or their bed was gone. In instances like that, we are truly failing our fellow humans.

Educating families in proper ways to treat, care for, and seek treatment for others going through addiction is crucial. Our rehab center CrossRoads of Southern Nevada will be announcing a series of education seminars for families on addiction.

There will always be stress and anxiety and trauma and mental illness, and there will likely always be drugs available in one way or another, whether it’s drugs or alcohol.

Add in the pandemic and economic stress, and we aren’t in a good place. It’s no wonder that we’ve seen an uptick in Nevada’s overdoses, and we’ve seen an uptick in beds filled at CrossRoads since March when the pandemic began.

But, as I write this on September 11, 2020, I’m reminded of the hope that followed that dark day on September 11, 2001. I’m reminded that hope always follows darkness and that the hope of entering recovery, getting a patient back on their feet, and turning their life around is why I got into this business. I’m constantly reminded of the hope there is in recovery every day, and I hope, as we move into 2021, we continue to provide that hope to our patients here at CrossRoads and around the country.





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Michigan

VEGAS FOOD NERD'S TREK ACROSS AMERICA PART II

BY VEGAS FOOD NERD

Traveling across the country is what this nerd got to do recently. A good friend from the music business decided to buy a recording console from a member of The Foo Fighters in Los Angeles and hired my husband and me to drive it from L.A. to commission the desk in its new home in Royal Oak, Michigan. In the last issue, I chronicled our first two stops. From Omaha, we decided to power through and get to Michigan the next day.

ANDIAMO'S

One of my favorite places to eat when I was a Michigander was Andiamo's. It was located just blocks away from the hotel we were staying at, and I had to go out of pure nostalgia if nothing else.



If you are not familiar with a meal at Andiamo's, the most important thing to get is their signature Zip sauce, a topping for grilled meat like no other. When we used to dine here, our go-to order was their chateaubriand. Beef tenderloin carved tableside served with potatoes, seasonal vegetables, and this crave-worthy sauce. It was disappointing to see that they had eliminated it from the menu. So, then my husband opted to get the filet that came with the Zip sauce, and I ordered the veal tenderloin sliced with the mushroom ravioli. Each offering comes with either soup or their house salad. We chose one of each and started with their take on pasta Fagioli, their house salad, and a selection of breads. The pasta Fagioli was impressive with white beans, pasta, and Italian ground sausage. It was delicious just how I remembered it. The veal tenderloin mushroom ravioli was meltingly tender and presented in a unique diagonal pattern, a veal slice followed by a ravioli on a mushroom cream sauce. It was an utterly decadent dish. The filet was our least



favorite, not bad, but nothing too special, but that Zip sauce? Yeah, it took me right back. If I could have taken a gallon of it home with me, I would have.





LEO'S CONEY ISLAND

The morning before we had to deliver the legendary Trident console to its new home in Royal Oak, I had to make one stop for breakfast. There are several things that you can get in Michigan that you can't get anywhere else. One of which is in pretty much every neighborhood in the mitten there is a Greek food infused Coney Island restaurant. Just blocks away from the Studio in Royal Oak is Leo's Coney Island. Growing up in Michigan, my parents would take me to a place like this about once a week. My father, in particular, was really into the authentic Michigan coney experience. It was just before nine in the morning, but I had to get a couple of childhood favorites Leo's famous Greek salad with a side of coney fries with cheese. The Greek salad is a simple combo of crispy iceberg, tangy pepperoncini peppers, sliced beets, Greek olives, chickpeas, and feta served with the signature dressing served with a warm piece of pita bread.



The coney fries aren't pretty, but the plate of fries served with the toppings of coney island chili, and coney cheese is comfort food to my senses. My husband didn't get it, but I didn't care. I was transported back to my roots. Next visit to my home town I've got to get some Michigan egg rolls. Trust me; it's a thing. Now go eat something.

Check out more by Vegas Food Nerd at FoodNerdMag.com.

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SUPPORTING AMERICAN ENTREPRENEURS’ RESILIENCY

By Michael Vallante

One thing entrepreneurs know how to do is solve problems; they are resilient. COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge, impacting every main street in America.

More than ever, there is widespread consumer awareness of how small businesses are the heartbeat of local economies.

The Paycheck Protection Program provided over \$500 billion to assist small businesses across the nation with retaining employees on the payroll. The PPP has allowed small businesses to keep their employees while they find solutions to today’s challenges. Solutions include creating outdoor dining and services, contactless door pick-up, door delivery, online orders, online events, and the list goes on.

Businesses are finding creative ways of surviving, but many are also creating a means to support other businesses’ recovery. In the process, they are creating new jobs to meet today’s business needs.

Businesses like eConnect, located in Nevada, received a PPP loan that allowed them to keep staff on payroll, develop a new product for the safe reopening of other businesses, and hire new staff. eConnect pivoted its operations and shifted to developing eClear™, a self-serve temperature check kiosk, allowing companies and public spaces to begin opening up while observing local ordinances and keeping the public safe.

It is not surprising that the latest jobs report indicated nearly 1.4 million jobs added in August, making it the fourth month in a row of over 1 million jobs added.

A record 10.6 million jobs have been gained since April, bringing back about 50% of the jobs lost from the lockdowns.

The amount of jobs added to the U.S. economy over the past four months has

surpassed expectations by a combined 12.2 million jobs. The August unemployment rate drop is the second-largest decrease on record. The unemployment rate has already fallen below the peak unemployment rate from the great recession of 10.0%.

The unemployment rate has fallen to a level that forecasters didn’t expect to reach even by the end of the year. This demonstrates the resiliency of entrepreneurs with the support of the PPP for their business and employees.

As the Regional Administrator for the Pacific Rim for SBA, and as Associate Administrator for the Office of Field Operations for our agency, SBA is ready to continue assisting, whether in-person, on the phone, or virtually through a webinar; we are here for small businesses and entrepreneurs. *Information about PPP forgiveness and other SBA resources are available online at SBA.gov.*







half-full

ARNOLD

SCHWARZENEGGER

by lincoln d. conway

Arnold Schwarzenegger has always been larger than life. First, he was the Austrian stud who intimidated and muscled his way into winning seven Mr. Olympia bodybuilding championships. Then he used his good looks and natural guile to make his mark in Hollywood and ultimately become one of the biggest box-office stars in the film business. Films like *Conan the Barbarian*, *Twins*, *Kindergarten Cop*, and *True Lies* are all part of the Schwarzenegger legend. But it was James Cameron's seminal 1984 film, *Terminator*, that indeed established him as a major international movie star whose classic line "I'll Be Back" became part of modern culture. He has since rekindled the role another five times throughout his career, starring in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003), *Terminator Genisys* (2015), and *Terminator: Dark Fate* in (2019).

Arnie has worn many hats in his career: he is a businessman, investor, former professional bodybuilder and served two terms as the 38th Governor of California from 2003 until 2011.

The former Mr. Universe is a Hollywood action film icon, a symbol for action heroes and a rough-hewn brand of macho swagger.

In 2011 he separated from Maria Shriver, his wife of 25 years, after it was revealed that he had fathered a son 14 years earlier with an employee in their household. He is the father of five children, four children with Shriver.

Despite his failings, Schwarzenegger is not a man to admit defeat. He has resurrected his film career in recent years, notably through *Terminator: Genisys*, having wisely skipped T3 (the Christian Bale film that was widely panned). Across *Dark Fate*, *Kung Fury 2* (currently in post-production), and the recently announced *Legend of Conan*, there is little to suggest the 72-year-old wants to wind down.

Today in Los Angeles, he looks fit, as expected, tan and healthy. Wearing a navy blue blazer and neat blue shirt, U.S.A. studded belt buckle, and massive skull ring, he is very well put together and smoking his signature Punch cigar.



STRIPLVINTERVIEWS

STRIPLV: All this time, all these projects, what keeps you going?

SCHWARZENEGGER: Well, listen, I think that at all times, we really need to give a huge thank you to God because no matter what we are all doing, we wouldn't be doing it without God. I have always felt this way, and my faith hasn't changed over the years. I was blessed by God and everything that I have done or achieved in my life and career. I owe a massive amount of gratitude to God. I have been asked when I've had moments where God is there and has pushed me through to achieve something specific – my response is that I can't name any specifically as that's not the sort of relationship I have with him. Instead, for me, I must say it is more like a presence that always sits in the background of who I am and what I do. I can rely on my faith at all times, and yet I won't burden it by asking too much of it at once.

STRIPLV: Did you have a happy upbringing?

SCHWARZENEGGER: Sure, I was brought up by such great parents, with my siblings and me having so much love for my mother and the discipline from my father. My relationship with my father was a lot more regimented, and there was always a lot of strictness in the way he wanted us to appreciate the world, but there was love there. Our upbringing allowed us to have the structure in our lives and the foundation to start us on our journeys in life.

STRIPLV: Fate or destiny?

SCHWARZENEGGER: Well, as I've always said, in life, we cannot just rely completely on God. What we all need to do is make sure that we try our utmost to do the best that we can in life. God gives us the tools to do that. There are success stories no matter where people are born, where they grow up, and what type of circumstances they arrive within the world. So, if you come from a small place on the map or a recognized part of the world, you can always make it – but as long as you work hard. I came from a very tiny place in Austria, a village called Thal. I was able to use the tools in front of me to prove that I was put on this Earth to do something special and to really achieve a great level of success in the world to prove that to other people, but most importantly to myself. I feel that I have gone some way towards doing that, and I am proud of the work that I have put in.

STRIPLV: Do you ever wonder what might have happened if you hadn't pursued the path you did?

SCHWARZENEGGER: Not really. I don't consider it. The fact is, the vision that I had of what I wanted to make of my life has been a big part of the reason that I have achieved success and the type of success that I wanted and set out in my younger days in my home country. It's no fluke. I was put on this Earth to do something special and to really achieve a great level of success in the world. I guess if I hadn't succeeded, then I may have been the type of person that my parents wanted me to be, a man who worked on a farm and had an army of kids, like the Von Trapp family from *The Sound of Music*!

STRIPLV: Obviously, you do many gun and action movies, so I wanted to ask your perspective of gun culture in America?

SCHWARZENEGGER: It's a constitutional thing in America. It started out in the wild west and the people had their own weapons and so for people in America its quite normal to have your own gun and to have your own weapons at home to protect your home and to be part of the gun-shooting and machine-gun shooting and whatever that you want to do. And in European countries, they have a different background and a different constitution and so they don't understand quite why the American citizens need guns.

STRIPLV: As Governor of California, did you learn anything about the cartels that shocked you?

SCHWARZENEGGER: When you are Governor, you get more information about this world, so I had the information from the real world of the cartel, and I also had the information from the movie version of the cartel, and so you put those two together, and you can come up with a very good scenario of the way they operate.

STRIPLV: But you have lived so many lives. Where does this passion come from to always reach out for something new? Is it something to do with your parents or your personality?

SCHWARZENEGGER: I think it also has something to do with America. It's maybe a combination. I was always very hungry, and I believed in the philosophy of staying hungry. So as soon as you climb one mountain, go and look for the next mountain and climb that and then the next mountain. Some people would call it restless. I find great joy always in trying to do things that people think are impossible, but I think that America is just an extraordinary country because here is someone who came here and saw all those doors of opportunity opening up, and these are doors of opportunity that I would not have had in Austria; I would not have had in Japan or in the Middle East or in Africa or anywhere else. It's just this is a very unique place. I came over here to be a bodybuilding champion because of Muscle Beach. So, you end up in Muscle Beach, and you end up where all the

gyms are where the world champions train, but at the same time, it also happens to be the same place where all the people become movie stars. It's the same town! Muscle Beach, Santa Monica, Venice, Hollywood, right next to it. So everyone who was working out at the gym in one way or another was involved somehow in the movie business. They were extras, or they were agents and stuff like this, so it was all there. So all you had to do now was have a vision and believe in your vision 100% without any doubt - because if you have a doubt about yourself, how are you going to expect other people to believe in you? You have to trust that you are special and that you can do it. And I always believed that. I had the confidence from my bodybuilding days. I had this vision of becoming this world champion in bodybuilding and everyone said it couldn't be done. Then five years later, I became the youngest ever Mr. Universe in London. I just trained every day like hell and did it. So that message is that if you really believe in something, you can do it. So one victory leads to the next victory and leads to the next victory.

STRIPLV: You were told you couldn't make it in America because of your accent, right?

SCHWARZENEGGER: That's right. I like to think I broke the mold a bit on that one. It was really just a matter of really being out there enough to have people hear my voice - that's why I did so many radio interviews where people don't see me but just hear the voice, that eventually the voice became so identifiable, and the accent became so recognizable that A) people weren't bothered by it anymore and B) it actually was a great addition because all of a sudden directors came out like John Milius (*Conan the Barbarian* director, 1982) and said, "If we didn't have had Schwarzenegger we would have had to build one!" So all of a sudden, the people who said, "With a body like that, you'd never be a leading man, you're too over-developed." Or with Cameron saying, "If we didn't have Schwarzenegger with his accent, I don't think if we would have been able to sell the idea of a Terminator because he talked like a machine and he is a machine, therefore, people bought into it." So all of a sudden it became a big plus.

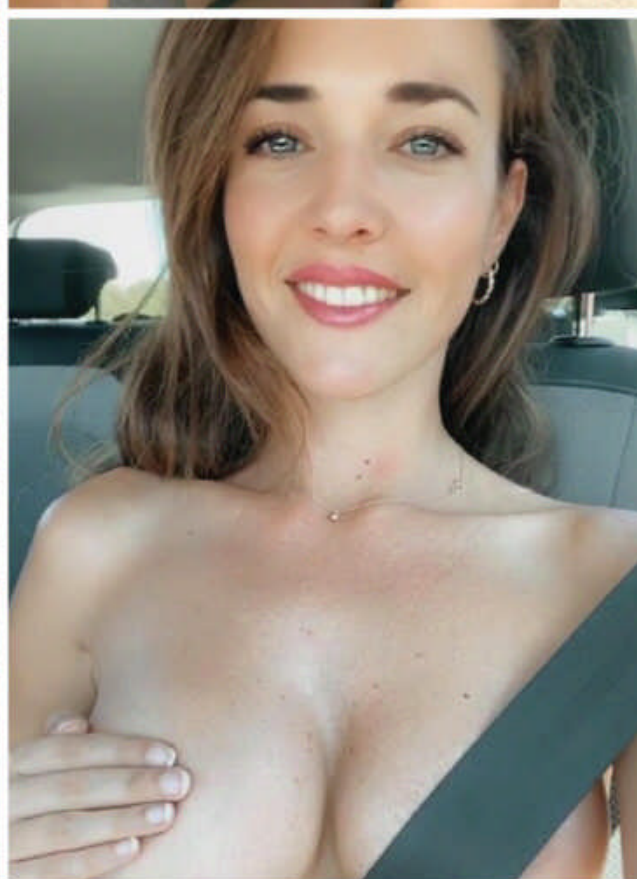
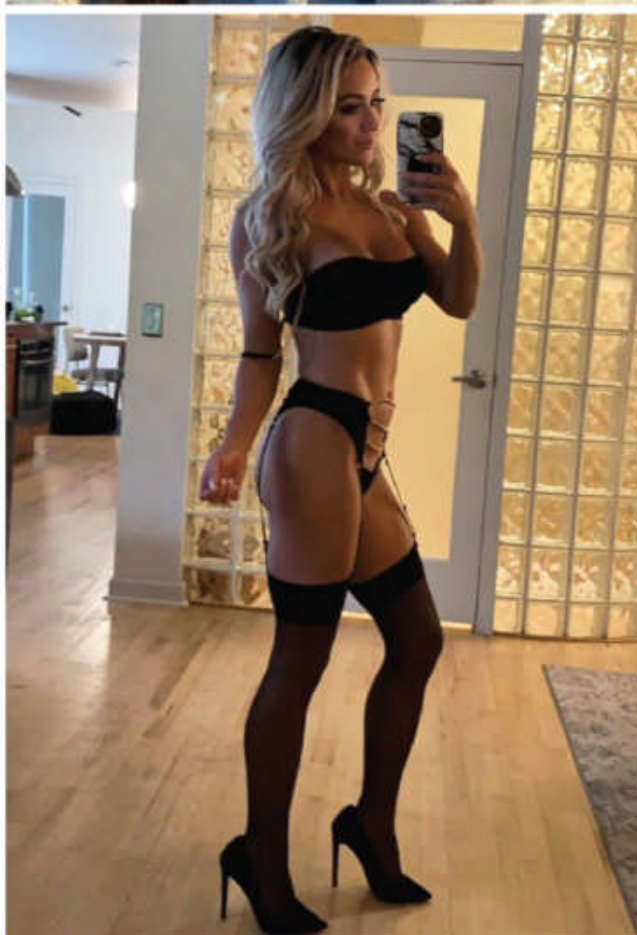
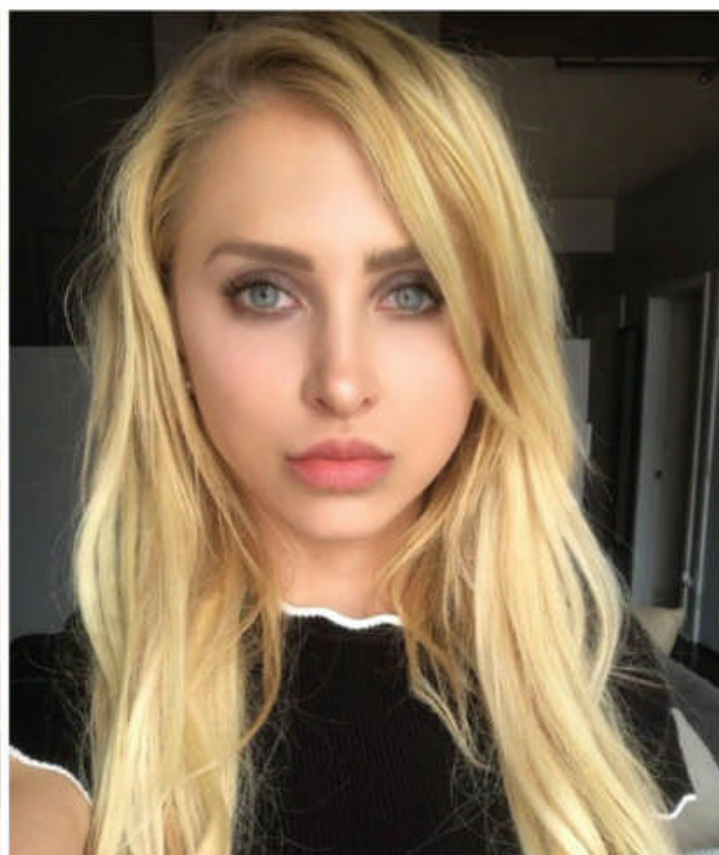
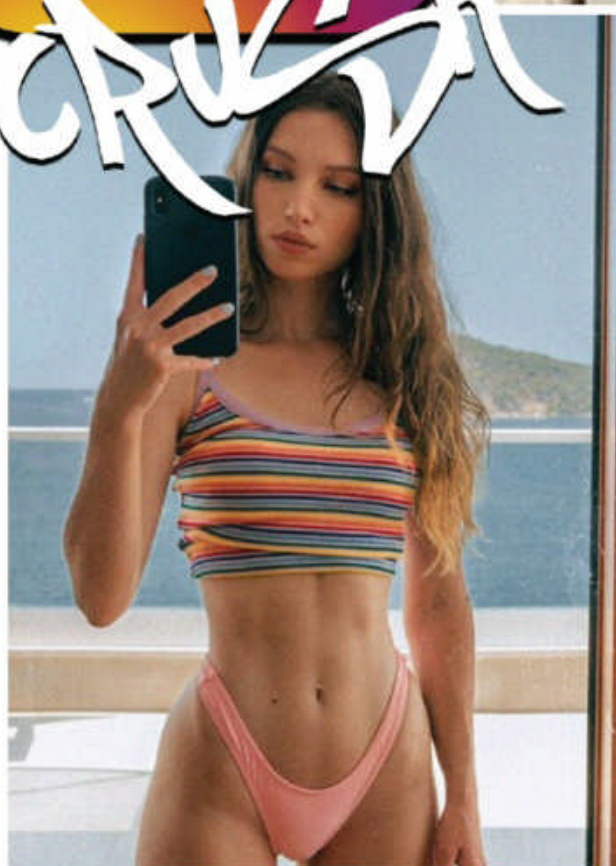
STRIPLV: Did you ever find yourself getting caught up in your image when it seemed like you were on top of the world?

SCHWARZENEGGER: I never took myself too seriously. What I did take seriously were the issues that I tackled. So if you talk about promotion of health and fitness and you become the chairman of the President's Council on Fitness, and you go through all 50 states, and you go into the schools, and you promote the idea of hiring more physical education teachers. Or if you go out and try to get an extra 500 million for after-school programs. Or if you go out and try to convince the people to get off fossil fuels and to go into more with renewable energy, since we have an abundant amount of that. So those issues I took very seriously, but I don't take myself that seriously because I'm, to me, life is all about, you know, hard work, and my father always said to me, "Be useful." To be useful, it's very important to do something that is bigger than you are, causes that are bigger than you are but have a good time at the same time. Smile, have a good time, have a positive attitude, and see that the glass is half-full rather than half-empty.





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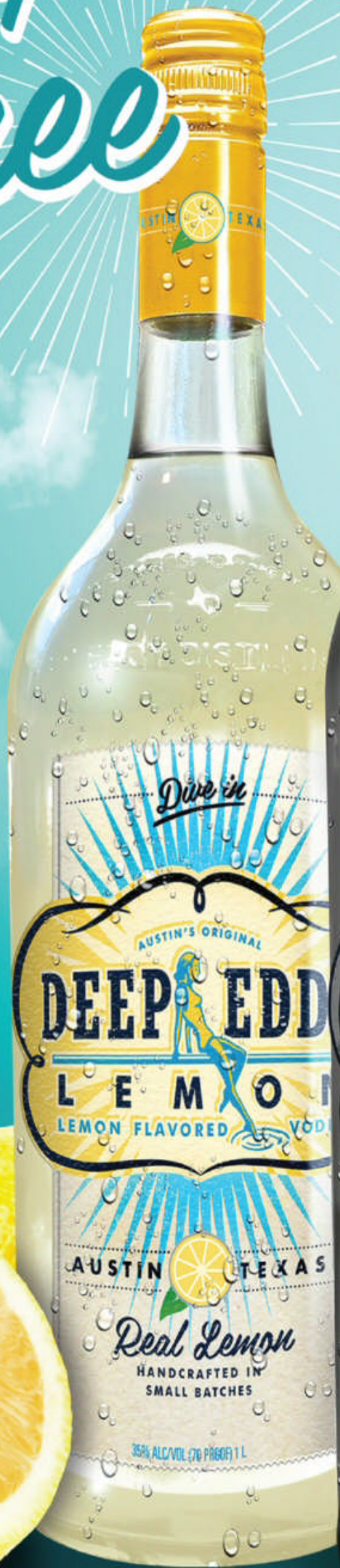
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KING ELLE NOIR - SHUT THE FUCK UP! IN HER OWN WORDS:

"It's cliché to say that I've been doing music my whole life, but I really can't remember a time where it didn't consume my entire self. As a kid, I had cancer, so I spent a lot of time in the hospital and unable to do things that other the kids did. So not only was a natural-born loner. I was also a natural-born creator. I had to create my own world to live in since I didn't have a place in the real one."

"I don't think any road is smooth. But I do think mine is exceptionally bumpy. I already mentioned my battle with cancer, but unfortunately, that wasn't the end. A huge bump that I really don't talk about because it's still a bit hard for me to process is the story of my leaving the church I grew up in and really going down my own path. In my family, religion is EVERYTHING, so leaving it caused a lot of problems that I won't get into. I moved out of my hometown when I was 17; to Minnesota, to Italy, to Nashville, back to Italy, and then eventually to LA. I did it alone every time.. & because I was so young and so alone, I actually ended up living in my car for my first five months in LA. I'd lay in the back seat parked in Walmart parking lots and shower at the beach. I worked four jobs until finally, I was able to get an apartment. It's a lot to process, and a lot of it is lost somewhere deep in my memory."



"I am an artist and a songwriter. I've worked with a lot of amazing artists and producers such as; IV Jay, Take a Day Trip, Wale, Tommy Lee, Marie Osmond, Big & Rich, Pussycat dolls, DA Doman, Polow Da Don, !llmind, and I just have a lot of fun doing it. I think that's the key, have fun and enjoy it!"

"My childhood is a blur, very in & out of the hospital. A lot of sleeping and a lot of pain. It's like, very compartmentalized if that makes sense. But I definitely felt happiest when I was singing at the piano in the basement. I would write the saddest breakup songs even though I'd never been broken up with. Lol. I remember my sisters yelling at me to shut up because I would literally play until like 11 pm or later. I never had a lot of friends or a desire to have any; the only thing I ever wanted to do was sit, write, and sing at the piano. If you asked anyone in my family, they'd probably tell you the exact same."

SOCIAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



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Joe Biden has narrowed his Supreme Court nominees down to Hunter Biden, Cardi B and John Roberts.

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striplv1 R.I.P. @chadwickboseman We will surely miss you. #chadwickboseman



striplv1 Great shoot w/ @katy.lou coming soon in @striplv1 shot by @santodonato06 #beauty #model #art #lifestyle #blonde #nude #naked #photography #eyes #bööty #striplv #striplvmag #passion #vegas #modellife #wow #lust #love #beautiful #katylou

SONY ALPHA A7C MIRRORLESS DIGITAL CAMERA



Compact and capable, the black Sony Alpha a7C mixes a full-frame sensor's quality and advantages with incredibly portable and sleek body design. Featuring a 24.2MP Exmor R BSI CMOS sensor, the a7C offers hybrid abilities to suit both photo and video recording needs and a form factor for every day, all-day carry.

The full-frame sensor and BIONZ X image processor offer up to a 15 stop dynamic range along with UHD 4K video recording, extended sensitivity from ISO 50-204800, and a top continuous shooting rate of 10 fps for working with moving subjects. The sensor also houses a Fast Hybrid AF system, which uses 693 phase-detection points and 425 contrast-detection areas for quick, intelligent, and precise autofocus performance with support for Real-time Eye AF and Tracking AF technologies. Also benefiting photo and video needs are 5-axis in-body image stabilization, which compensates for up to five stops of camera shake for sharper handheld shooting.

Compared to other a7-series camera bodies, the a7C has a distinctly sleeker profile that mimics a rangefinder's styling, with an offset viewfinder and a streamlined top plate. The re-positioned electronic viewfinder is a 0.39"-type OLED with a 2.36m-dot resolution and is complemented by a 3.0" side-opening vari-angle touchscreen LCD. Built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth enable wireless connectivity for remote camera control and sharing files to a connected mobile device. \$1,798, available at BHPHOTO.COM.



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LIAM GALLAGHER

by **skye**huntington





To make a mark in music takes more than talent. It takes image, swagger, style, and the ability to weigh up the risk with a kind of tragic nihilism. They say that musicians sit at the very peak of frustrated creatives. Still, those who remain at the top of that industry are those who like to revel in the almost Shakespearean contrast between happiness and discontent.

For Liam Gallagher, the former frontman of Britpop pioneers Oasis, his reluctance to enjoy the good times has been something of a signature move. The Mancunian and his brother Noel's tumultuous relationship right up to the band's cessation in 2009 was a defining characteristic of an act which brought indie fervor to a sound that encompassed everything from the songwriting majesty of The Beatles to the glam rock excesses of T-Rex, and so much more besides.

Oasis's longevity and ability to engage an audience across seven albums was largely down to their ability to repaint the canvas at any moment, and while Liam Gallagher's subsequent projects, Beady Eye (2009-2014) and his subsequent solo work have been relatively less fractious, the now-47-year-old frontman's ability to grab headlines has never wavered.

With the release of his new record "MTV Unplugged Live at Hull City Hall," which features stunning musical arrangements with a full orchestra and clear, beautiful production Gallagher is back full throttle with adoring fans singing along on most of the tunes.

These days engaged to Debbie Gwyther, who he plans on marrying next year, after high-profile marriages to singers Patsy Kensit and Nicole Appleton, Gallagher discusses rock 'n' roll excesses, growing older, and how the industry has evolved almost to a point where it is unrecognizable from the mid-nineties.

STRIPLV: You've curbed a bit of the rock n roll lifestyle, in which you were almost certainly the main one of your generation to push. But as the years have gone by, you're now a little bit more sensible to your body. Am I right in thinking that?

GALLAGHER: Well, don't be fooled into thinking that I've quietened down totally because I may jump up and surprise you and be there when you're least expecting me, you know what I mean. (Laughs) But no, seriously, no messing around, I am running in the mornings when I haven't had a gig the night before, I am making sure that I look after myself to make sure I can be the best I can be for the fans who pay their hard-earned money to buy my songs and albums and who come to those gigs. You've got to give them the value for the money because I've had fans who've stuck with me right from the days of Oasis, and I love each and every one of them for it. So, the gigs are to repay them for that love that they show me all the time, and I'm giving that love right back to them through music. But,

yeah, there's always been a voice in my head telling me that I should not have that extra drink or whatever and that I should go to bed, and that'll make sure I'm better in the morning. But it was normally drowned out by the other voice telling me that real rock 'n' roll stars don't listen to the rules; they go with the flow, man. Nowadays, it's the other way around, and that voice of reason and the sensible one in my head has overtaken the devil and that it doesn't matter if I stay awake in the small hours to see what's going on. I know that whatever was there the night before will be there in the morning, well, the important things, anyway. It's an age and experience thing, man.

STRIPLV: One thing which has never changed in your life is, as you say, the music. You've always been the one who rushes to get to the studio first and is the last one to leave.

GALLAGHER: Yeah, that will never change with me because music is the one thing that will always stay as a constant in my life. It's everything to me, and it's why I am the man that I am. People know me for a lot of things, some good and some not so good, but the one thing that everyone who knows my name will identify me with is the music. I love making music, I love writing songs, I love singing and love being in the studio, and I love the process that goes with trying to make the perfect song. It's really like my second home because it's where I feel comfortable, and it's like it's my natural habitat. Making music is what I was born to do, and I feel thankful that I've got the ability to do it and to make a load of people happy. That's the beauty of music – no matter how good you think a song is that you've put together, you can always go back and try to make a better one. So, I like to put the work in, work really hard, and make sure that you leave everything in that studio and give it all that you've got.

STRIPLV: Does the passion ever subside?

GALLAGHER: Maybe if I was doing the same thing every day, it might, but the thing about being a musician is you are in complete control of your creative destiny. I'm not driving a bus around the same fucking route in Manchester time after time – I'm thinking of new ways to do things and new ways to express even old thoughts and emotions. What amazes me most is people still want to listen to this shit, but I'm glad they do. I do feel privileged in terms of what my day job is, that is for certain.

STRIPLV: Where would you be without that outlet?

GALLAGHER: A bit worse off, I'd imagine.

STRIPLV: You talk about the fans being with you for so long, but your music and particularly since you've re-branded as a solo artist, has attracted much younger fans, some of whom weren't even alive when Oasis were in their prime.

GALLAGHER: It's very flattering when you get to my age that the music that you make is still attracting new fans of all different ages, and it has made me think about how that has happened. Is it the marketing and the way we put the music out through the new channels of streaming services? Have they spent ages on there and going through rabbit holes of watching music videos and listening to songs and then finding my stuff and going through the history and back catalog of Oasis and Beady Eye and now my solo stuff? I think that has definitely happened with some of the new, young fans who love their music. But what I also think is that if you look at the hardcore Oasis fans from the first time around, they're of a similar age to me and now they've had kids and either they've had our music, and now my music played to them all the time, or they have heard they're parents playing it and they like it. It's nice to think that the music I've been involved with has not only stood the test of time but also the new stuff is loved by loyal fans and attracting the new generations all the time. That just gives you the get-up and go to make more music, because you're doing it for a reason. I wouldn't be here without all the fans, because if no one is buying the music or listening to it, I'd be skint, as I said.

STRIPLV: Do you think that modern musicians have the same passion with their different mechanisms for getting music out there?

GALLAGHER: Well, they certainly have the passion, yeah. The passion comes from the heart, and that's what makes you pick up an instrument on day one and get singing. I have absolute respect for any musician trying to find their way and, perhaps, in the process, giving themselves a bit of creative therapy in the process, because quite a few of us are like that. What is different is the fact you can press a button now, and a track is out there, being consumed, shared, discussed, and all that bollocks. When we first started out, that whole process took weeks, and you had to work the promo round so fucking hard just to get the slightest bit of attention. When Oasis first started out, we would be gigging most nights. We had a label with a bit of clout, but it was all about us being 'out there' in interviews, trying to build an image over the course of weeks and months, and then having the fucking talent to back it up. You couldn't just send a tweet and expect the world to start clocking on to whatever it was you were trying to flog. I think a lot of the satisfaction we gained as a band was a result of knowing we'd worked so fucking hard for it in the first place, and I'm glad we did.



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WHAT HAPPENED IN VEGAS

THE NIGHT WE BECAME A GHOST TOWN

By Howard T. Brody

Usually this column focuses on the people and events from our city’s rich and famous, if not infamous history that helped to establish and shape the place we’ve become. In this issue, however, we reach back only a handful of months to an event that has impacted our city profoundly and, for better or worse, might be shaping and designing our future.

At 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday, March 18, 2020, for the first time since November 25, 1963, the date of John F. Kennedy’s funeral, the process of shutting down the world-famous Las Vegas Strip began.

Twelve hours later, not only were the lights dimmed or shut off entirely in hotels and casinos up and down the Strip, but the dancing fountains at the Bellagio were shut off, and both the automotive and foot traffic along the Strip became non-existent. Sometimes, unless you have a timepiece, if you weren’t paying attention to whether it was light or dark out, you couldn’t tell if it was noon or midnight along the Strip because of the bumper-to-bumper traffic and the horde of people walking from one property to another. Sadly, on that Wednesday and for the many days that followed, noon along the Strip looked more like midnight in any rural town in America as there was nary a soul in sight.

Unfortunately, the Strip wasn’t the only place in town to be impacted. All of the properties just off the Strip like the Palms and Rio Las Vegas were closed, as were all of the hotels and casinos along Boulder Highway like Sam’s Town and Boulder Station. Outlying properties such as South Point, The M, Green Valley Ranch and Red Rock Resort were shuttered too, as were all of the hotels and casinos in the downtown area, including those under the 12-million light bulb canopy of the Fremont Street Experience like The Plaza and the Golden Nugget.

By the time rush hour rolled around Wednesday morning, some seven to eight hours after the shutdown, traffic on the usually heavily congested I-15 as well as travel on I-11 and both I-215 and I-515 seemed more like what one would expect during pre-church Sunday morning than a bustling city’s busiest time of the day.

Yes, the once small desert town that over the years picked up the well-earned the nicknames of “Sin City,” “the Entertainment Capital of the World” and the “City of Lights” . . . the small town that grew to a population of more than 2 million, which is the brightest city on Earth as seen from space, went dark.

Like some apocalyptic science fiction movie, virtually overnight, Las Vegas turned

into a ghost town, not too different than it did back in ‘63, except, unlike the events that honored the assassinated 35th POTUS, this time around, Vegas didn’t just close for a day, it stayed closed for months, a very real nightmare for tens of thousands of hotel and casino workers, and hundreds of thousands of residents all across the Valley who were impacted.

Following state of emergency announcements and stay at home orders in New York and San Francisco, the odyssey for Vegas started on the afternoon of March 17, 2020. Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak held a news conference at the Sawyer State Building in Las Vegas and issued an executive order for all of the slot machines in Nevada to be turned off at midnight, with the state’s casinos and non-



essential businesses to be shuttered at noon on the 18th. The measure was only supposed be temporary; 30 days at most, all in an attempt to stem the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Well, we all know how that turned out.

The Strip didn't start to reopen for business until June 4, nearly three months after it had been shuttered, and even then, it was slow and methodical resistance. The Mirage, one of the most popular and well-known properties on the Strip, didn't reopen its doors until August 27th, some five months after the lights went out. As we go to press (September 20, 2020), ten hotel and casinos still remain closed. They are Fiesta Rancho, Fiesta Henderson, the Palms and Texas Station (owned by Red Rock Station Casinos), Eldorado Casino, Eastside Cannery and Main Street Station (owned by Boyd Gaming) and The Cromwell, Planet Hollywood and Rio Las Vegas (owned by Caesars Entertainment).

Politics started to play a role in the city reopening too, as those who pushed to reopen the properties felt the pushback of those who didn't. Democratic governor Sisolak following the lead of California governor Gavin Newsom and taking away the citizen's civil rights, ordered a statewide mask order and even shutdown rural parts of the state that had no deaths and only a few Covid-19 cases.

Although Las Vegas has opened back up, like most major cities, we are still not at full capacity, and the coronavirus continues to take its toll on us. None of the stage shows have opened back up, strip clubs and brothels remain closed, and bars that don't serve food, which had been reopened, were shuttered for a second time. The city's newest residents, the Las Vegas Raiders of the NFL, are about to play their first game in the \$1.8B Allegiant Stadium to no fans. In addition to the vast number of individuals affected by the virus, many businesses became fatalities due to COVID-19. According to Yelp, 60% of the business closures in Las Vegas that were due to the coronavirus pandemic are now permanent.

If nothing else, we know that Las Vegas has proven to be a resilient city through the years despite hotel fires, Earthquakes, gangland murders, and the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history.

While we usually try to make light of the *What Happens in Vegas* slogan, we can indeed say this time around that *What Happened in Vegas* stayed in Vegas, and for the most part, it really sucked!

But, Las Vegas will be back to its former glory. It'll take a while, but the glitz, glamour and sexiness of what Sin City has always been will return.



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TOPSY TURVEY PART 2

A FICTION SHORT-STORY BY THE SANDOVAL BROTHERS

"The only deviation I see is you from sense. If it is true that life is so abundant out there, then why have we seen nothing of it? Not a trace," it was validly pointed out by Vicente. "There is no tangible proof of outside life – beside disputed UFO sightings, I guess."

"I have seen dozens of UFOs in my time. Most of the time at night, but sometimes in broad daylight."

"I am sure, Bernstein," I comforted. "The thing, my doubting friend, is that the answer to the apparent lack of proof is merely effective execution of protocol."

"Protocol," both Vincente and Bernstein droned in concert.

"Yes, protocol. Standard Operating Procedure. We have seen nothing definitive because we were kept from seeing anything definitive."

"How would you know this?" Vincente snapped.

Keeping the comportment of an officer trained to endure a range of mental stress and fatigue, I simply answered, "Because I was told of the protocol directly."

"By who? Your make-believe associates at the Space Force?"

"No," I sighed. "By my alien hijackers."

"Just to start off, what makes you think that we should believe any of this? What makes you, Nadir, think that you are all that special? Why would you get a conference with other-worldly beings and the rest of us left for –"

"To be honest," I stammered, "I have no idea why I was chosen. I mean, I was Flight Commander, I guess. So, they must have had some preference for rank."

But really, I knew that Bernstein, Vincente, and Chambers were just as trained, seasoned, and capable as I had been.

"Flight Commander?" homeless Vincente standing beside the dying fire balked, "Flight Commander of what?"

"I thought I made it clear. I am – was – Flight Commander Nadir from Juno IV."

"Oh, really?" I heard Vicente condescend.

"Believe me; I couldn't make this stuff up if I was desperately trying. I am the only known survivor from the disappeared Juno IV. *That* Commander Nadir, is *this* Nadir. It's me. Or at least, it was at a certain point in time.

"Well, where did it disappear to?" pressed Bernstein. "If you were Commander, do

you know what happened to the shuttle."

"You would think, but no. I mean, I know where – generally, speaking, of course, where I wound up. But what happened to the shuttle? The rest of the crew, I don't have the foggiest. I don't know if any of you were following the launch that fateful day, but we just barely broke from Earth's grasping orbit when all, everything, was just absorbed in a blinding white, only to be broken up afterward by a deafened realm of black. When I was returned, I learned that you here on Earth were just as perplexed and lost as I was – well, not as lost in the true sense. But the mystery of Juno IV has persisted on...for those who don't believe me, that is."

"The disappearance was certainly unexpected and is still unexplainable," recounted Chambers warily. "All the eyes of the world were watching that day – every school child...every dreamer. Before very long, and right in front of everyone's watchful eyes over the live feed, suddenly, the shuttle vanished. There was a glitch in the signal that lasted a split second, but by the time it cleared, there was nothing to see other than a black screen.

"Every host and commentator tried to soothe their audience before cutting to commercial or alternate programming while trying to figure out the lasting glitch. But no one could. We would later learn that just as we lost visual at home, flight control lost all their sights on the shuttle as well. All their different tracking gadgets and gismos just dropped the shuttle. It was almost like the shuttle never existed. There was no beacon signal, no emergency signal, no signal of hope.

"NASA and other space programs worked together for months in a joint search effort for the shuttle. Even trace debris from the wreckage would have brought at least a little bit of closure. But there was absolutely nothing that ever turned up.

"With no signs, years were then spent trying to retrace every instruction and step of the belated mission to figure out what went wrong. No one ever got a satisfying answer. There were theories and debates about what had happened. But it was agreed by almost everyone that space travel – commercial, government, or independently-funded, had to be suspended for a while. Until at least some answers were found to prevent anything like that from happening again."

"Well," Bernstein voiced, "there were those who figured it out right away that it was simply an alien abduction. Somehow aliens beamed up an entire shuttle and all of its crew inside."

"No one has figured anything out, Doug!" rebuked Vincente sternly. "You're talking about crackpot conspiracy theories and half-baked ideas."

"A lot of it made sense," Bernstein carried on unapologetically. "I mean, there was also the theory that you guys got sucked into a miniature black hole. I liked that one. Tons of people blamed the Russians and Chinese for kidnapping you all and the shuttle so that they could steal the technology that we haven't been sharing with them. There were both Russians and Chinese in orbit that day, so that was a good one too. Others said that our own government did you guys in on purpose and covered the whole thing up. Maybe somebody in the crew saw something that

they weren't supposed to see during all their missions or training tours before the mission. Oh, yeah, then some said that the shuttle and crew never really existed at all – in the current reality, I mean. They said something like the memory of the crew was just a mass delusion or a collective faulty memory that those who originally came from a slightly different reality have of a group of astronauts who actually existed and were part of a mission to Mars back in the other reality. But in the current reality we have been moved to, they never really existed at all."

"I do feel like sometimes I don't really exist here, that is for sure" I couldn't help from half-chuckling and half-sobbing. "But the first theory of abduction hits it right on the head."

"What were the aliens like? Are they like little green men after all?" a now enthused Bernstein nearly blew out my ear shouting.

"Jeeze," moaned Vicente.

I tried to describe, "They didn't look quite like the space invaders or space ambassadors from the movies. Not my detainers, at least. I mean, as I said, alien species come in all variety size, form, and composition. I wouldn't be surprised if there were some that looked identical to E.T. or the Roswell mascot. But when I finally came to my full senses, I was astounded by what I was met by."

Now I had all three finally shut-up and listening.

"At first, I thought I woke face-to-face with a ghost. On earth, we have accounts throughout history of supernatural visitations by translucent floating figures. I have never seen a ghost before – I don't know about them now. But the aliens who fished me out of space were much like phantom spirits. Sometimes I thought they resembled the classic death-shrouded depictions of the beings of the haunt, but for the most part, they were essentially shape-fluid. With every directional movement, their pallid vaporous essence was distorted. It turns out that their kind was from a gaseous planet, much like our own Saturn – but without the rings. Life in that environment – if it wanted to spring up – needed to take the form of gaseous organisms.

"It completely beats me why they were in possession of a physical craft. I mean, their spaceship was not built for their biology in the least. They had no use for the doorways I was carted through. They never spoke through what was, I assumed, the telecommunications system. It was like the craft was built for a creature of a very similar stature as myself. Of course, I could never make out any of the symbols labeling the control modules. And I never did see anything that looked like a proper toilet for a human. But I assumed that the ghost aliens simply just stole and used another poor abductee's craft. I know that they needed to place me in an enclosed environment I could survive in and they needed a vehicle to transport me in. Surprisingly, they got the oxygen and heat levels just right for me. But why they couldn't use my own shuttle to store me? I don't know. Maybe they wanted to keep me in an environment that was not overly familiar."

Before I could get my next words out, I was hit by a barrage from Bernstein. "Who cares about the ship? What did they want with you? Did they run all kinds of experiments on you? Is there really a probe?"

"It was not really about me at all," I corrected. "There was nothing that they learned from me throughout my stay with them. They already had an understanding of human biology, civics, and even history that were beyond even my general knowledge. On top of that, their hold on science and mathematics was mind-numbing. For all my scholarship, I probably would have flunked out of their version of kindergarten if they have learning institutions, or even if they have young, at that."

"So what was the purpose of horrifying all the Juno IV onlookers and ruining the lives of the crew members...to who knows what extent?' Chambers pandered aloud.

Vincente jabbed, "Kurt knows the extent, supposedly. Right?"

"I only know how things turned out for me. I honestly don't know if the other crew members managed a breath after jettisoning our final boosters on our way out of orbit."

"I thought captains were supposed to go down with the ship?"

It took me just a second – maybe more, given the abrupt shifting I noticed in

everybody's stance around the fire when I looked back up – but I answered, "I don't need to be reminded of that by anyone. Even when I am all alone, I hear it a million times a day."

I cannot escape any of it.

"Leave him be," diplomatic Chambers demanded.

I didn't need the help, as well-intentioned as it may have been.

But Chambers continued in my hesitation, "If they took no interest in what a human had to offer, and if they went out of their way to return you back home, what was their driving force?"

"You mean to ask, why I was spared, and the others weren't" I heard myself bellow, "I have racked my brain endlessly to determine just that. But at least I know why they let me return."

"Why?" Someone asked.

"To bring home the warning."

"A warning for who?"

"All mankind. It is a warning, with humanity itself at stake."

Even Bernstein faulted trying to best that kicker. Chambers even struggled keeping an open mind.

"What exactly is the warning?" Vicente was finally decent enough to ask.

"That is a whole story, but I guess I can try to make it short – but it won't be sweet. And I cannot guarantee a happy ending. But an ending, regardless, will be determined soon by those who still have a stake in this world."

"What's the warning already?"

"I was told to inform world leaders and their world followers that a transition in the order of galactic rule is very soon to trigger. In itself, the transition of power from one alien planetary or system's specie to the next is nothing novel or perilous. It has been done essentially an infinite number of times before the surviving records of most. But the poles have portended an anomalous occurrence that has been (dare I say) delayed."

Those huddled hollered, "What?"

"Their version on polling is something that comes close to a mass psychic reading of all the galaxy's lifeforms, conjoined with a super-computer simulation, tinged with a calendar counting down bequeathed prophecy. This mystic, yet scientific means of future-telling has been deadly precise of much. And now it indicates a term of rule for the Volfurash. Now, the looming reign of the next regimen should not be thought of quite like unilateral authority, but rather something like a majority rule of law going forward. But majority rule goes a long way in their manner of dominion. Suffice it to say, the implications of this handoff are profuse."

"Hold up now," demanded Bernstein, "Volf – Volfer-who?"

"Volfurash. That is what my captors called them. But I was told that most of the galactic civilizations and entities have their own names for this race. They guessed that if they were to try and translate the root meaning behind the moniker into modern-English tongue, it would amount roughly to something like the Topsy-Turvies."

"What kind of name is that," laughed Bernstein in sophomoric amusement.

"I thought the translation was rather fitting; that is, from what I have been told of the specie."

I could sense the intrigue, so I proceeded.

"Well, now. It is my understanding that the Topsy-Turvies are one of the oldest versions of life within the known and accessible sections of the universe. They are also probably the most adaptive and resilient species out there. They owe their robustness and flexibility, in large part, to the environment in which they evolved.

As single-cell organism began to complicate on a massive meteorite catapulted through space, the distant predecessor organisms of the Topsy-Turvies were forced to continually roll with the punches. As the meteorite wobbled and tumbled through space over the eons, the living conditions erratically shifted.

“The beings that started to grow self-awareness absorbed the fickleness of their motherland. The trajectory of the society that was eventually to come, flip-flopped just like the soil of their sprouting.”

Vincente stole my place as I stopped for a breath. He rushed in, “Life on a meteorite? That could never be. We know that all life needs water. What kind of life could start from an environment completely missing water, oxygen, or regular exposure to solar light?”

I replied matter-of-factly, “Well, at this time, the majority foolishly subscribe to that narrow scope of life creation. Yet even in the preceding century, we have come to see many extraordinary paradigms, here on Earth alone, of tenacious evolutionary strands of life thriving in the most inhospitable conditions of the planet. We have drudged up life at the very deepest recesses of our oceans that, through the process of chemosynthesis, convert the hydrogen sulfide or methane of deep-sunken hydrothermal vents to a sustainable biomass – rather than relying on the process of photosynthesis, which is reliant on the filtered shine from the sun. Habituating to the total absence of light and the boiling water from their surroundings, these guys don’t need your precious Goldilocks criterion of just right solar light and just-right temperatures. Vice-versa, the ice worms that burrow through North American glaciers don’t complain about their subzero environment.”

“Mere anomalies, are they not?” the always collected, and inquisitive Chambers queried.

“Well, maybe not,” I replied delicately to Chambers. “There is a whole cast of known extremophiles, with more being uncovered every year.

“Extreme Files?” Vicente errored. “What are you talking about?”

“*Extrem-o-philos*,” I amended. “They are organisms that not only survive but thrive in the most extreme conditions found on earth, hence their namesake. These tough little guys are perfect exemplars that fly in the face of Goldilocks enthusiasts. Take as another example, the Loriciferan creature. This thing was discovered just barely over twenty years ago; it has a developed set of organelles that allow it to function without oxygen.

“Or how about Endoliths? They live inside rocks or crevices several miles below the earth’s surface! There where water is scarce, they have found a way to live; it is believed they feed on iron and potassium, and then there is.”

“Okay, you show-off, you’ve proven your point. If these organisms actually really do exist,” interjected my annoyed doubter.

“My point is, life will exist anywhere it wants to. A meteorite juxtaposed to a nuclear reactor, where the world’s most irrepressible form of life, the Deinococcus Radiodurans, live, is nothing at all.

“I chose these examples for a reason, the root in all of their names explains either their resolve or their foundation of existence. Same goes for the Topsy-Turvy specie, whose existence not only shatters one primitive human notion of universal understanding but two.”

“Which two?” Chambers requested.

“Perhaps the two most imperative ones. The first that we are the only living organisms in the universe. That is about as ridiculous, self-serving, and egotistical as thinking that the earth is the center of the universe. The second that the Goldilocks Zone is a prerequisite for life. That theory is about as credible as the flat world theory.

Before I continued, a deafening silence fell all about my team, no one could think of anything to say, so I resumed, “Look, if you don’t believe me, that’s fine, I mean who am I, well, let’s not dive into that, let’s stick with the plain science okay?

“I mean, it is common knowledge that early researchers in the international space programs stumbled upon bacteria that managed to hitchhike their way from the surface of the Earth up to space. Those samples emphatically demonstrated that bacteria could retain their hold on life through dormancy for months at a time even

after being nakedly exposed to space’s fluctuations of temperature, radiation, and light.”

It was simply an erroneous thought that every strand of life spread across nearly infinite worlds needs to go through the same dance Earthlings have in order to come to terms. But I don’t mean to shame anybody. Water, after all, is indeed such a crucial factor for the shared evolutionary heritage of Earthly creatures. Then again, that is just what you would expect from life raised on a planetary surface composed of seventy-one percent by water.

Carbon molecules are so esteemed here because they are merely the best bonding element we have here to form large and complex molecule chains. But our periodic table is very incomplete compared to others. Aside from Element 115, our table is a cookbook for beginners.

“I don’t know about all of that,” Vicente pecked at my re-vision (annihilation) of the Goldilocks theory.

“Well, trust me, my old friends know quite well on the subject. Anyway, as I was saying, just like their meteorite that they have ridden around on, the Topsy-Turvies are, by and large, of a mercurial and capricious cerebral constitution.”

“These are the guys taking over operations, you say?” Chambers double-checked.

“That’s what has been projected for some time to come now. It is because of their very dispositions that they have been limited in the extending governing body up to this point. Despite their great numbers – which have swelled with their infestation throughout the galaxy – despite their seniority, regardless of their resiliency, their turn has been astutely avoided for epochs. But for just as long, the fight for commiserate and timely representation has been clamored for. It cannot be ignored forever. The order must keep up the appearance of being objective and non-discriminatory.”

“When are they taking over?” it was asked.

“Soon. Very, very soon, in terms of the galactic clock.”

“What does that mean?”

“Maybe within our own lifetime. Probably within one or two upcoming generations.” “But why of all times?”

“I told you, it could not be avoided forever. There is definitely that. But then there is another factor. I was also spoken to of the existence of a space plague of sorts – something like a self-replicating computer virus entity that travels between interstellar civilizations at the speed of light. This blight is a calamitous threat to all species who rely heavily on artificial intelligence to manage their worlds, particularly to the species that have merged their biology with mechanical processors. Such circuits and information storage systems easily fall prey to the roaming virus.

“While my captors were more of a gaseous makeup, and utilize the transmission of information telepathically, making them less susceptible to direct corruption from the virus, they acknowledge the threat this bane holds over the universe’s vast and permeating public network of data storage. You know, like the cloud ecosystem here on Earth – not the atmospheric clouds but the cloud that is used mainly to store everybody pointless pictures – the universe also has a network of something like linked remote servers.”

“An alien cloud?” I was challenged by a scrunched faced Vicente. “If there is such a thing, why haven’t we detected this network before? Why haven’t we tapped into this source of information for ourselves?”

“I said it’s like our concept of the cloud. No one set up servers, per se. Their version exists in a non-physical plane of existence, like the ether—something like a lifeorce of astral information. And, now that you mention it, some within our midst have already waded around a little within the kiddy pool of their grand cloud. Have you have heard, among the open-minded, reference to the Akashic Records? The cumulative collection of human events, thoughts, and emotions from all human existence from the past, present, and even future?

“You guys have no idea what I’m talking about?” I inferred from the dead silence. “That’s fine; it’s not all that pertinent to the immediate situation. Getting back to what I was saying, it is the fear of this virus hacking into their cloud that has

pushed many civilizations and entities in the great expanse to bow down to the Topsy-Turvies for a while.”

“But what does all of this have to do with us?” it was poised.

To bring the matter a little closer to home, I proceeded to tell then that previous galactic administrations have firmly upheld a general rule that life is to develop to maturity without avoidable outside interference. This is why, I explained, Earth has been left alone despite the abundance of alien life out in the cosmos. Methods were taken to veil signs of alien presence from Earth: transmission codes encrypted to near-random noise; blinders, something like 3D screensavers, put up all around the edge of our solar system; and so on.

“For the most part,” I relayed what I was imbued, “under the two previous administrations that have coincided with existence of life on Earth, there have been less than a handful occurrence of direct external interventions.”

It is specific protocol that intervention can only be proposed when over two-thirds of a total global ecology is under threat – as forecasted by their mindreading, super-computer calculating future telling apparatus.

Such intervention in the past with other worlds have been prompted by occurrences like globally devastating climate swings or so-called planetary cleansings. Still yet, the order has been known to make their presence felt when a local inhabitant group begins to sneak up on the development of a cyber malware capable of interstellar proliferation. There are other instances when the near grasp of new innovations thought to be adverse to universal security triggers an immediate intercession, like when time travel capacities nearly get stumbled upon or when planetary civilizations work on capacities to tamper with their mother star’s nuclear energy, and so on.

Though I simply acknowledged, “Very commonly the administration steps in if it is determined that a civilization or specie threatens life on neighboring celestial bodies with their space travels and colonization attempts. Remember, it is a valued belief that all life should develop, believing it is alone in all of creation, until it grows out of childhood, that is. This belief was primarily put into action in response to the early history of the Topsy-Turvies.

“Now the thing is, the Topsy-Turvies are speculated to overturn this principle of relative independent maturation – perhaps, just for the amusement enjoyed by contrarians...or maybe for reasons of a more selfish nature, it is feared.

Though the Topsy-Turvies originated on a flung meteor, they quickly developed space travel and left their boulder to inhabit other worlds. Most of the time, the Topsy-Turvies settled for worlds that cultivated lower orders of life. And almost in all cases, the Topsy-Turvies pushed the indigenous aside until the provisions of the planet were depleted beyond regeneration. Unlike their mostly unwilling planetary hosts, once conditions got too dicey, the Topsy-Turvies simply resorted to their evolutionary penchant for long-term hibernation.

The Topsy-Turvies can survive almost any conditions. Employing a nearly impervious dormant state when necessary, the Topsy-Turvies simply wait out their hosts who are abandoned to suffer through ecological collapse. In turn, the Topsy-Turvies gain a great advantage in the long haul by pillaging the natural resources the worlds left behind by their extinct natives. But their greatest advantage comes from their excavations of forgotten esoteric knowledge buried with lost civilizations belonging to natural predecessor beings or prior external visitors.

I continued, “If the principle of promoting independent development is flipped for Earth, our world will be transformed overnight into the Star Wars Cantina. It will feel something like, I am sure, an Easter Islander before Cook being dropped off in 2039 New York City, except far worse, because unlike the islander just seeing the modern form of man in its variety, we will be exposed to conditions unimaginable. And, guaranteed, we will almost always be on the side disadvantaged by the gaps in capabilities and influence.

“Though it is not officially recognized by any over-reaching governing body, there are forms of prejudice and discrimination that exist throughout the galaxy. From my experience, it is actually a fairly common practice to rank organisms by how quickly they took to develop, independently, to circumvent the speed bump of lightspeed’s limitations.”

“Nobody wants to be the natives suddenly invaded by outsiders,” Bernstein did a good job to catch. “It’s never worked out for the outmatched side. What would we

do if all of this turned out to be?”

“You each better look up the Boxer Rebellion.”

Bernstein evinced his inner consternation, “This is it? Your big warnin’ is everything as we know it is going to be changing, and there is nothin’ we can do about it?”

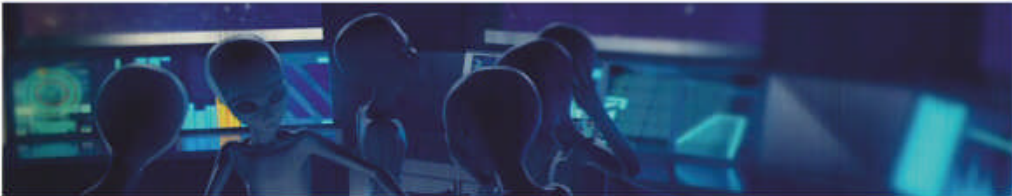
“I am just giving you what I was given – all that I managed to grasp, I should say. But from my vague impression – and my deepest hopes – I think that we will be given more updates and more advice as events unfold. I think we should carefully mind the next street person who claims to have encountered ghosts in the cosmos. Listen for the name, the Volfurash.”

“Ah,” a re-settled Bernstein concluded. Your story was just okay. I got all little caught up in it, but it was not all that unique. “My other buddies got something pretty similar out of this nut of a woman who was just admitted to the shelter on the north side. She came in with real bad PTS and amnesia, they say. But she was rabbling on too about the end of the world at the hand of an outer-space bug or something. She said she was dropped from the sky at one point. Maybe the two of you should talk. She likes talking about space too. They humored her backstory for a while. But after they ran some DNA tests to see if she was the person she thought she was, they determined she was crazy.”

In a weep of a laugh, I remarked, “Anomalous DNA damage prevents conclusive ID matching.”

“I heard something about that woman too,” Chambers corroborated. “Her name was like...what, did they say...Christine...Chambers?”

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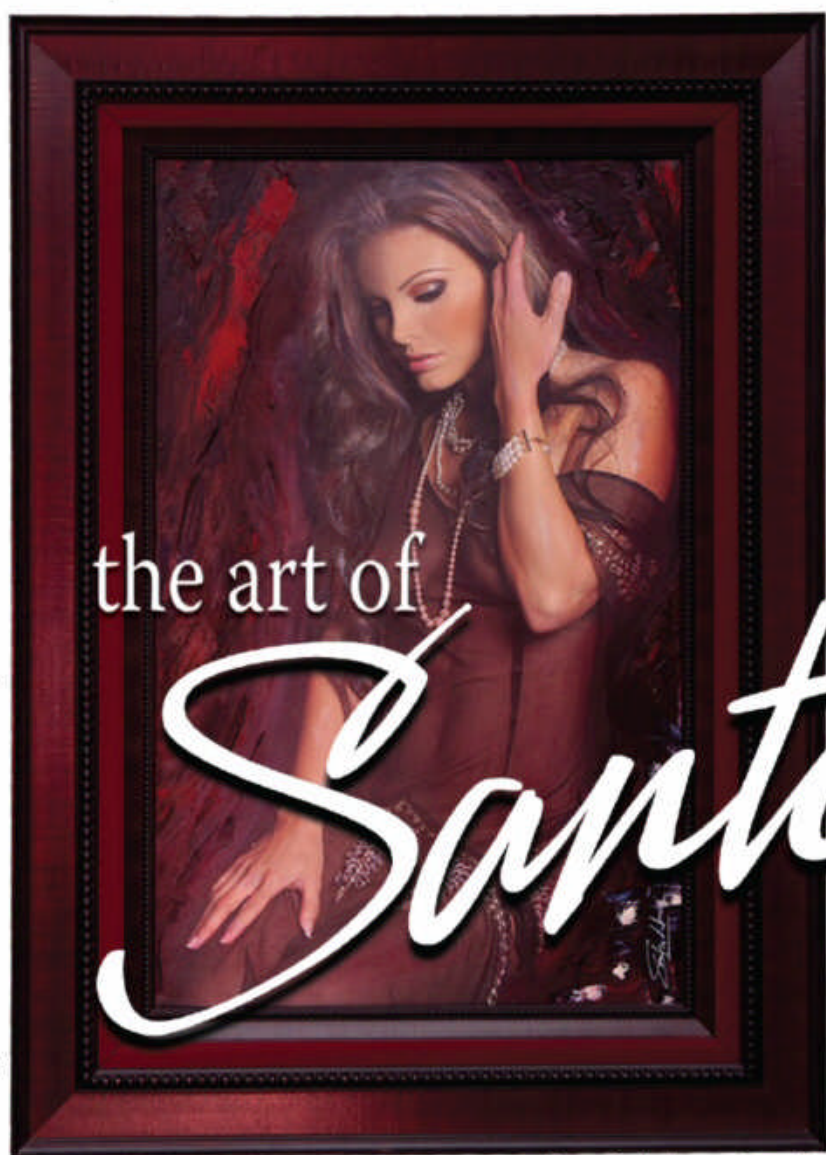
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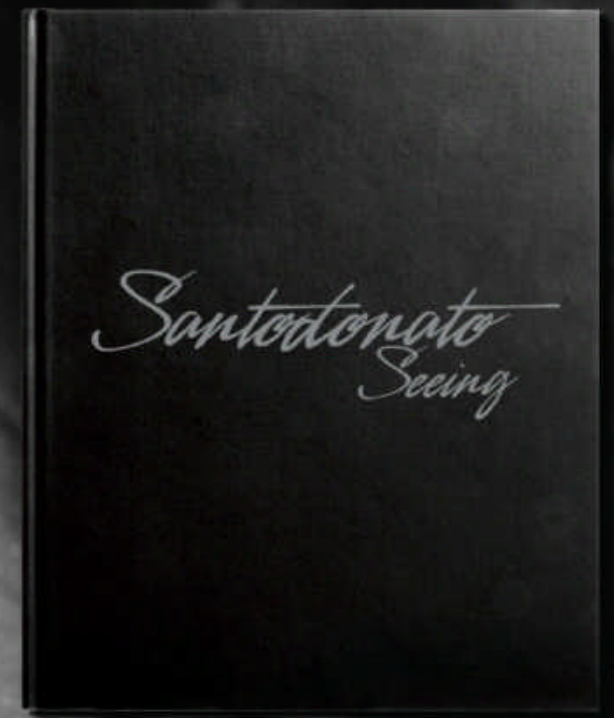
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